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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 KUWAIT 000633

SIPDIS

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TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PINR](#) [PREL](#) [KWMN](#) [KU](#)
SUBJECT: INAUGURAL SESSION OF KUWAITI PARLIAMENT PROCEEDS
AS EXPECTED, WITH DRAMA AND FIREWORKS

REF: KUWAIT 621

Classified By: Ambassador Deborah K. Jones for reasons 1.4 b and d

Summary and Comment

11. (C) In the June 1 inaugural session of the Kuwaiti Parliament, Amir Shaykh Sabah Al Sabah warned in unusually harsh terms against "chaos and discord," and made clear that he would not hesitate to dissolve the Parliament again if it failed to move past the political stalemate that marked the previous Parliament's tenure. He lamented lost development opportunities, and promised a "comprehensive development plan" from the GOK. The Amir also took a shot at the Kuwaiti media, complaining that it has "exceeded the framework of responsible freedom." Incumbent Parliament Speaker Jassem al-Khorafi was re-elected, despite predictions that he would be challenged for the influential post. Nine Islamist MPs staged a walkout during the swearing-in of their colleagues, protesting the composition of the newly-formed Cabinet and the inclusion of two women as Ministers. Islamic Constitutional Movement MPs disrupted the swearing-in of newly appointed female minister Dr. Moudhi Al Homoud, decrying her unveiled presence as a violation of Shari'a law. Behind the Amir's harsh tone many Kuwaitis see an implicit threat to dissolve the Parliament indefinitely, an extra-constitutional move that would draw protests from some, but might be applauded by other Kuwaitis who fear the increasingly Islamist makeup of the body. Tensions will simmer for now, with only a few sessions before the Parliament breaks for the summer. GOK-Parliament confrontations will likely escalate in October, when the session resumes. End Summary and Comment.

Amir Threatens Parliament, Chides Media

12. (C) Kuwaiti Amir Shaykh Sabah Al-Ahmed Al Sabah convened the June 1 inaugural session of the Kuwaiti Parliament (reftel), warning in unusually harsh terms against "chaos and discord" (fitna) sowed by MPs in the previous Parliament. He made clear that he would not hesitate to dissolve the Parliament again if the political stalemate continues. The Amir called for placing national interests above "all other considerations," implicitly directing a threat towards MPs who were elected on May 17 due to their tribal affiliations. He called on MPs to ensure that "development projects are not lost in the midst of political strife and crisis," a reference to the stalemate over Kuwait's long-delayed Northern oilfields project. He also promised a "comprehensive development plan," the first of its kind, to be submitted before the Parliament returns to session in October (Note: Parliament will meet twice in June and possibly again in July before recessing until the end of October. End note.)

¶3. (C) Sounding a familiar theme, the Amir extolled Kuwait as a model of democratic openness, but complained that the media recently, "exceeded the framework of responsible freedom and the regulations of professionalism and the requirements of national interest, instigating chaos and tension at times." PM Shaykh Nasser Al-Mohammed Al Sabah echoed these themes in his own remarks, stressing the need to heed the Amir's call for national responsibility and begin a "new parliamentary era." Like the Amir, the PM stressed development goals and highlighted work on a new GOK development plan.

Al-Khorafi Re-Elected as Speaker

¶4. (C) By a surprisingly large margin, MPs re-elected Jassem Al-Khorafi as Speaker of the National Assembly (per protocol, third in line to the seat of Kuwaiti power) over his fellow independent Abdullah Al-Roumi. Many had predicted a tribal/Islamist challenge to the pro-Government Al-Khorafi. Shaykh Mohammed Al-Abdullah Al-Mubarak Al Sabah, a ruling family insider and government lobbyist told POLOFF that Al-Khorafi is now "a power of his own." Al-Khorafi in the end had the support of both moderates and Islamists. Liberal MPs supported his opponent in part due to personal grudges over public financial wranglings between Al-Khorafi and leading liberal MP Mohammed Al-Sager. The Prime Minister and Defense Minister, both known to have public feuds with Al-Khorafi, abstained from voting for the Speakership.

Islamist MPs Protest Cabinet Selection, Women Ministers

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¶5. (C) Per protocol, after the Amir's opening remarks and subsequent departure, each MP and Cabinet Member (who vote as ex officio MPs), in alphabetical order, publicly swore an oath of allegiance to the Amir and Constitution. To protest the Prime Minister's Cabinet selection, particularly the inclusion of two women as Ministers, nine Islamist MPs, dubbed by the press as "Neo-Islamists," staged a walkout during the swearing-in of the first Minister to be called (ironically, an Islamist himself). They returned at the end of the swearing-in ceremony, and made their pledges without further disruption.

¶6. (C) During the swearing-in of the newest woman to be named minister, Dr. Moudhi Al-Homoud (participant in the January 11 POTUS women's roundtable event), two of the remaining Islamists, in an attempt to drown out her oath, shouted objections and protested her unveiled presence as a violation of Shari'a and Islamic law. Immediately after the completion of the oaths, an Islamic Constitutional Movement (Kuwaiti Muslim Brotherhood) MP lodged a formal protest claiming that the two female ministers should not be allowed onto the National Assembly floor unless properly attired (or covered) per dictates of Shari'a. The protest was dismissed by the acting speaker as the floor was not yet open to such motions. In the end, the matter was referred to the Parliament's Islamic guidance committee, where it will not likely re-emerge.

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